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ABSTRACT

This paper presents personal reflections on the nature of learning and the purpose of schooling and their implications for defining the work of professional development schools (PDSs). The paper examines the implications of intuitive learning, differences in learning, and political aspects of learning theory for professional development schools. This examination of learning theory suggests that: (1) it is unnecessary to conceptualize totally different types of learning environments for child and adult learners; (2) constructivism offers a powerful theory of child and teacher development; (3) learning should be self-directed, inquiry-oriented, and based on life experience; and (4) learning is both a cultural and a developmental process. The paper offers a vision of a PDS as an empowering, emancipating learning community that frees people from ignorance and knowledge that is trivial, subjugating, or hegemonic knowledge. The paper describes four characteristics of empowering learning communities (constructivist, problem-focused, multicultural and inclusive, and social reconstructionist) and outlines how they can guide PDS work. An example of a learning activity, which can be used with both teachers and students, that embodies these characteristics in an integrated fashion is provided. In addition, a brief discussion of how PDSs as learning communities would differ from traditional schools and teacher preparation, focuses on textbooks, teacher talk, traditional modes of grouping, and the dominant culture. (Contains 47 references.) (IAH)

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Professional Development Schools:
An Opportunity to Reconceptualize Schools and Teacher Education as Empowering Learning Communities

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Professional Development Schools: An Opportunity to Reconceptualize Schools and Teacher Education as Empowering Learning Communities

Abstract

Professional development schools offer teachers and teacher educators the rare possibility of examining implicit beliefs about the nature of learning and the purpose of schooling. This paper lays out my own personal reflections on these matters. I begin with the questions, "What does it mean to learn?" and "What kind of learning environments do we want to create?" I conclude that the first question is insufficient to guide the formation of a PDS. Learning and schooling are social constructions. They are what we want them to be. The second half of the paper offers a vision of a PDS as an empowering learning community.

Introduction

Over the past year or so, I have been meeting with a group of university faculty, administrators, and school personnel in planning a collaborative Professional Development School (PDS). As readers undoubtedly know, a PDS aims to improve the quality of education for all participants by linking the work of schools and universities. Students, parents, experienced school personnel, teacher educators, and those aspiring to teach are all learners. A key assumption is that the improvement of schools is closely linked to the quality of teaching and that teaching is most improved when reflected upon in context (Hawley, 1993). In this sense, a professional development school is distinctively different from a traditional school which is organized to facilitate the learning of only one group of participants, namely children.

What I write about in this article are the questions that plagued me during those planning meetings. The approach I take is deliberately narrative and autobiographical. I do not presume to give a comprehensive picture of PDS planning and change efforts, but rather my own singular perspective.[1] How has this particular reform movement shaped my thinking as a teacher educator? What basic questions has it made me reconsider? How have I begun to reconceptualize schools and teacher education? Hopefully, reconstructing my own on-going journey will invite readers into the dialogue about reform and engage them in a reconsideration of their own practice.

First of all, what do we mean by reform? Too often we talk about reform efforts as ways of "improving" schools and teacher education. Too often, words like 'school improvement' function as a gloss. They present "superficially attractive appearances" which cover up or ignore fundamental questions such as "What is it we are trying to improve? How? Why? For whose benefit?" A term like school improvement can give license to any type of change or reform without any agreement on (sometimes without any discussion of) the direction, benefit, or purpose of change. To say that the improvement will or must lead to better outcome measures--such as decreased drop-out rates, increased attendance, and improved achievement scores--simply begs the question of the value of those measures. What type of knowledge and achievement is being

assessed? *A long list of recall items which students are bound to forget the following year?* Why do students stay in school? *Because, as in some parts of the U.S., they will lose their drivers' license if they do not?* Or what do they do once they attend school more? *Sleep? Skip classes? Read comics? Disrupt their teachers? Spend time in detention?*

Clarity about the type of learning environments reformers want to create is essential if they are to get beyond hollow statements about school improvement, achievement gains, and collaborative relations. What kind of improvement is envisioned? What type of achievement is valued? And for what purposes are various groups collaborating? Only a re-examination of basic beliefs and goals can guide reform efforts in any meaningful way. How is such a process begun? One way is to ask again foundational questions about schooling--to look closely at those things typically taken for granted.

This is the approach used at the weekly PDS meetings I attended each week. The problem with this approach is that huge numbers of questions can be asked and left unanswered. In fact, one of our enterprising graduate students compiled a list of questions generated by committee members in the course of just five meetings. The list of questions numbered 208; answers only 23. It included everything from "Do we know who the teachers will be?" to "What is the school's role in society?" Nonetheless, such an open-ended beginning is probably inevitable, maybe even preferable, in generating ideas about new endeavors.

I personally became preoccupied, maybe even obsessed, by just two of those questions: "How do people learn?" and "What kind of learning environments do we want to create?" For me, these questions were at the heart of collaborative reform efforts. While I first thought there was a contradiction between the two questions, I later came to believe that the first was merely incomplete and could be misleading without the second. The rest of this paper is an analysis of those two questions and the related issues they evoked. I look at the implications of intuitive learning, differences in learning, and political aspects of learning theory for professional development schools. Arriving at the conclusion that no theory of learning provides a sufficient basis for

developing a professional development school, I construct an argument around the concepts of emancipation and empowerment that could guide reform efforts.

How People Learn

Since learning is a central concern of many involved in PDS and other school improvement efforts, a key question would seem to be "how do people learn?" If we can answer that question, we might have a way of figuring out how to teach better and how to structure schools to facilitate more meaningful teaching and learning. But those modifiers ("better" and "more meaningful") bring us to my unease with the question of how people learn. It seemed to me that that question was too narrow and technical to guide the development of learning environments. In my mind, it had an essentialist quality; I felt that it presumed that all people learned the same way. I worried about the neglect of what I considered to be more important questions, such as "What *is* meaningful learning?" or "What ideas, values or skills are *worth* teaching?"

Because my own academic preparation was in the areas of sociology of education and critical cultural theory, I was also concerned that my own lack of grounding in developmental or cognitive psychology was preventing me from valuing the question of how people learn. With that in mind, I opened Howard Gardner's The Unschooled Mind which had been sitting on my bookshelf for several months. In his description of how children think and how schools should teach, Gardner (1991) reminded me that young children learn intuitively. They learn language and other symbol systems, and develop serviceable (though often deficient) theories of the physical and social worlds. The fact that children all over the world develop comparable theories suggests the importance of neurobiological and developmental influences on learning.

This means that children come to school having already learned incredibly difficult things in the absence of intentional teaching. They do not arrive at the school door as empty slates. They are natural learners, having well formed conceptions, and misconceptions, of how the world works. While some of those misconceptions are corrected as children progress through developmental

stages and reorganize their knowledge, others are remarkably robust. They remain intact despite the official school curriculum teaching otherwise.

I began to see the value in asking the question of how people learn. The child's intuitive learning offers clues about what the work of professional development schools should be. If each of us (child and adult) creates our own "forms of knowledge" (Gardner, 1991, p. 26), then learning environments should be deliberately constructivist. They should be designed to help people explore, revisit, expand upon, or change prior understandings. If ignored, prior concepts and beliefs simply re-emerge (Paul, 1987). The unschooled mind, by force of habit and tradition, overtakes reason and scholastic learning.

Further reading and discussions with colleagues also helped me realize that those who study how people learn do not necessarily have a technical or essentialist perspective. They consider the impact of context on learning, the political as well as the scientific aspects of learning, and variability in learning. What learning theories tell us about these areas is worth exploring in more depth.

The Social Construction of Learning

We know, first of all, that individuals have the adaptability to learn in a number of ways. However, not all of these are necessarily good, wise, or humane, even if they might be efficient or effective. People can learn through hidden or overt persuaders such as subliminal messages or threats of physical violence. They can learn through indoctrination: by being exposed to only one explanation, belief, or point of view. They can also learn by being humiliated or belittled. In addition, some ways of learning and some theories of learning are more appropriate for some tasks than for others. Or, as Jerome Bruner (1985) would say, "any model of learning is right or wrong for a given set of stipulated conditions" (p. 5). These conditions include the nature of the task, its specificity, and its meaning to the learner. A behavioral theory of learning which relies on the importance of practice might explain and guide the learning of complex manual skills like

handwriting or bicycle riding, but it is not a very good guide for language learning, critical thinking, or deep understanding.

Second, explanations of learning are theories, not absolutes. Even a constructivist theory of learning, although powerful and useful, is only one among many. Each has its shortcomings and its critics. And, as Bruner (1985) claims, each theory involves a political decision about "what a learner should be in order to assure that a society of a particularly valued kind could be safeguarded" (p.5). Only societies which value such things as scientific ways of knowing, rational decision making, or ethical and aesthetic judgments would be interested in constructivism.

In this regard, Bruner joins Elliot Eisner and Basil Bernstein in believing that the question before us is not what learning is, but what it should be. Learning is whatever we say it is and make of it. Through our culture, relationships, and institutions, we create the type of learning that occurs in our society. In Bernstein's and Eisner's words, "the curriculum is a mind-altering device" and education is a "mind-making process":

> What we think about matters. What we try to do with what we think about matters. And so it follows, what schools allow children to think about shapes, in ways perhaps more significant than we realize, the kind of minds they come to own (Eisner, 1993, p. 5).

So although the question of how people learn sounds innocently neutral and scientific, it is ultimately and profoundly political.

A third related point about learning is that different types of people learn in different ways. Although Gardner persuasively argues that all minds exhibit similar patterns and constraints, he is also widely known for his theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993): the belief that "students possess different kinds of minds and therefore learn, remember, perform, and understand in different ways" (1991, p. 11). Some approach learning linguistically, others spatially, mathematically, kinesthetically, or interpersonally. This theory is consistent with various theories of individual and cultural learning styles. As Gardner himself admits, "we are as much creatures of our culture as we are of our brains" (1991, p. 38).

Adult vs. Child Learners

But if different types of people learn in different ways, surely this would complicate the establishment of a professional development school. An underlying assumption of a PDS is, after all, that all participants (adults and children, teachers and students) are learners. Is it possible to create *an* environment conducive to learning for all ages and levels of experience? Or do different types and ages of learners need quite different relationships, structures, and resources for learning?

With that question in mind, I decided to explore the literature on adult learners and young learners. I wanted to determine whether the different developmental stages of these two groups would preclude the possibility of bringing them together in a mutually beneficial learning environment. I began my literature review with the chapter on "Teacher Development" in the Handbook of Research on Teacher Education which conveniently listed five principles of adult learning. The principles claim that "adults exhibit characteristics and learning needs significantly different from children's" (Burden, 1990, p. 318). Wanting to test this assertion, I substituted the word "children" for adults as I read through the list to see if the principles would still hold.

Principle #1 stated that "Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy; therefore these needs and interests are appropriate starting points for organizing adult learning activities." But aren't children and adolescents also motivated to learn by their needs and interests? Is there ever justification to ignore students' experienced needs and interests? Although we do it all the time in schools, I doubt there is any developmental justification for such a practice. Principles #2 and #3 are related to the first. They state that an adult's orientation to learning is life-centered and that experience is the richest resource for adult learning. Therefore the curriculum should focus on life situations rather than academic subjects and the core methodology should be the analysis of experience. Again, why would "experience" be the richest resource for adult but not child learning? Simply because adults have more of it? Wouldn't children also benefit by analyzing their experience?

In Principle #4 we are told that "Adults have a deep need to be self-directed; therefore, the role of the teacher is to engage in a process of inquiry with adult learners rather than to transmit knowledge to them . . . ." In failing to question knowledge transmission in itself as a mode of teaching, this principle makes some unspoken assumptions about child learning. The underlying logic seems to be: Adults learn best through inquiry. Adults are different types of learners than children. Therefore, children must learn best through a different mode of teaching. Since knowledge transmission is the only other type of teaching mentioned, it follows that adult learning theorists accept it as the proper method of instruction for children. However, deriving principles of learning for one population based on "assumed" contrasts with another is problematic. A more reasonable research approach would be to study that other population directly.

The last principle (#5) claims that "differences among people increase with age" and so adult education should make "provision for differences in style, time, place, and pace of learning." There is, of course, an abundance of literature on individual differences and the need to differentiate the curriculum to accommodate the needs of all learners. So even if differences increase with age, this does not mean they should be ignored prior to adult education. As with the other principles, I could see no major differences between the needs of adult and child learners.

Not wanting to base my conclusions on my own intuition, I decided to look for principles of child learning. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) had published research-based position statements on developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education (Bredekamp, 1987). It seemed like a good place to look for contrasts between adult and child learners. If the claim that adult learning needs were "significantly different" from those of children had merit, the differences should be most apparent with youngest children. Strangely, however, I found a set of guidelines which looked remarkably similar to those which were supposedly unique to adult learners.

Parallel to Adult Principle #1, NAEYC claims that curriculum should be based on each child's special interests and development, that learning in a meaningful context is essential for

understanding and for stimulating motivation in children. "If learning is relevant for children, they are more likely to persist with a task and to be motivated to learn more" (p. 53). So apparently the link between personal interest and motivation to learn is not the exclusive province of adult learners.

What about adults having unique needs for learning to be life-centered and experiential? For the curriculum to be organized around life experiences rather than academic subjects? Do children have different or opposing needs? Not according to the research. NAEYC reports that "children's learning does not occur in narrowly defined subject areas; their development and learning are integrated" (p. 3). They learn by doing--through the complex interaction of their "own thinking and their experiences in the external world" (p. 51). They "acquire knowledge about the worlds in which they live through. . .interaction with objects and people" (p. 52). Therefore, like adults, their learning activities should be as concrete, real, and relevant to their lives as possible.

But what about the fourth principle: the "adult" need for self-direction? Maybe here we'll find an authentic difference. Aren't children, after all, helpless, senseless creatures in need of adult direction? Not according to the experts. Much like adults, young children seem to learn most when they direct their own activities. They "feel successful when they engage in a task they have defined for themselves" (p. 3). They need to select their own activities, with the teacher organizing the environment and facilitating their engagement. Teachers need to *give* young children opportunities to be self-initiating and self-directing. Although teaching often implies telling or giving information, "the correct way to teach young children is not to lecture or verbally instruct them," but to provide stimulating activities and to pose challenges. "Knowledge is not something that [should be] given to children as though they were empty vessels to be filled" (p. 52).

And finally we come to a review of the fifth principle, that individual differences increase with age. Apparently those who study adult learners and those who study young children should do some collaborative research. Both seem to be making identical claims for very different populations. According to NAEYC, the *younger* children are, the more varied are their learning

styles and needs. "The principle of practice is that the younger the children and the more diverse their backgrounds, the wider the variety of teaching methods and materials required. . . .Enormous variance exists in the timing of individual development" (p. 65-66).

Apparently, each of the five principles of adult learning applies equally to the education of young children. Furthermore, curriculum guidelines which include the learning needs of older students (those attending middle and high schools) make similar claims about learning environments. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (1991), for example, encourages teachers to represent mathematics as an ongoing human activity; to respect student ideas and ways of thinking; to encourage spontaneity, curiosity, and risk-taking; to help students draw and validate their own conclusions; and to be responsive to student diversity.

So I discovered or reaffirmed several things through this exploration into learning theory: that there is no need to conceptualize totally different types of learning environments for child and adult learners; that constructivism provides a powerful theory of both child and teacher development; that learning should be self-directed, inquiry-oriented, and based on life experience; and that learning is as much a cultural as a developmental process.

Professional Development Schools as Learning Communities

Having expanded my own understanding of how people learn, I now realized that I already had some answers to my second question, "How should learning take place in a professional development school?" But I still liked this question better. It more explicitly acknowledges that the process of learning takes place under variable and socially constructed conditions over which people have control, that learning is not a "given" process, and that learning theories are always linked to our social values and beliefs.

Early in our planning committee deliberations, I had listed eight characteristics of a PDS learning environment which expressed my own educational values. I had written that the learning environment of a professional development school should be constructivist, metacognitive, scholarly, interactive and communitarian, problem-focused, multicultural and inclusive,

empowering, and social reconstructionist.[2] My explorations of learning and the needs of adult and child learners made me even more convinced of the importance of each item.

I believed that multiple characteristics of professional development schools were important. In my reviews of proposals for school and teacher education reform, I had been negatively impressed by the "singularity" of the visions--as though one type of reform would make all the difference. I'm thinking of such reform ideas as making the curriculum more multicultural or more constructivist, constructing a curriculum around problems or essential questions, or making teacher education more academic or more personal or more reflective. While it might be a wise approach to focus on one issue at a time, and to keep working on that issue, it is not a good visionary tactic. It does not open up enough space to re-envision learning environments. I believe that only a set of characteristics can do that.

Yet the more I looked at my list, the more dissatisfied I became. For one thing, it kept expanding. On what basis was I including or excluding characteristics? The answer, unfortunately, seemed to be, if I happened to think of them at the time. Each time I looked at the list, I seemed to add new items: democratic, developmentally appropriate, connected, emancipatory, global, or dialogical. These ideas are just as important to me, but they did not spring to consciousness on the day I happened to create the list. This expanding list of concepts made me wonder if there were commonalities I was not seeing--some underlying principle or principles that would bring structure, order, or relation to the concepts.

Emancipation and Empowerment

The term empowerment kept capturing my attention. I tried to figure out why and came up with several reasons. First, it has wide currency in the professional literature right now. Many would say it is overused, a mere slogan. Often, it seems, school districts "empower" teachers and schools to be autonomous and self-managing when the school district itself has given up on reform. The district has failed, it can no longer figure out what to do to improve schools, so it shifts the responsibility (and therefore the blame) to the local level. But this is only the bleak side

of the picture. On a more positive side, many teachers and teacher groups have expressed concern about their lack of input in important school and community issues.

A second reason why empowerment may have seemed so important to me is that I had just started teaching an action research course and was reviewing the work of Lawrence Stenhouse, who talks about classroom research leading to emancipation. By emancipation, Stenhouse means the "intellectual, moral and spiritual autonomy" which comes when we hold ourselves responsible to personal judgment rather than to authority (Hopkins, 1993, p. 3). This notion probably captured my attention because it was reminiscent of the work of Paulo Freire, which had been an early influence in my professional life.

Emancipation and empowerment seemed closely aligned: to be free *from* something in order to have power *to do* something. What do empowering learning environments free people from and give them power to do? Surely freedom from *ignorance* would have to start the list. Knowledge frees us from our mental blind spots and darkness. What does this freedom from ignorance give us power to do? Very little if our ignorance vanishes by someone dispensing information. We would still be dependent on the veracity of the information-giver. But if the learning environment was organized to teach us how to learn, how to construct meaningful knowledge of the world and judge its accuracy, then we would be empowered. In keeping with my earlier reflections on how people learn, I was again convinced that a fundamental characteristic of a PDS should be *constructivism*. An empowering learning environment should explicitly and self-consciously engage participants in meaning making.

But is that all a professional development school should do? Some would undoubtedly say yes, that the sole function of schools is to impart knowledge and dispel ignorance. But it seems to me that closure here is premature. It wrongly suggests that all knowledge is of equal value and fails to acknowledge that the role of schools is primarily social and moral, not cognitive. Schools and PDSs are social institutions. Whether or not we want them to be, they are learning *communities*--

not simply neutral environments--the term I've been using in this paper up until now. They are part of and contribute to the types of societies we live in and re-create on a daily basis.

Therefore, a more comprehensive view of education is that it not only frees people from ignorance, but should free them from certain types of knowledge as well. I can think of at least three types of knowledge that are detrimental to the development of human potential and to the viability of pluralistic, democratic societies. Those types are trivial knowledge, subjugating knowledge, and hegemonic knowledge.

Figure 1: Empowering Learning Communities

Emancipate or free people from	*Empower or free people to*	*Characteristics*
ignorance	construct meaning	constructivist
irrelevance	problem solve	problem focused
subjugation	respect differences	multicultural & inclusive
hegemony	reshape the world	social reconstructionist

Trivial knowledge has been popularized by television quiz shows and mass-marketed in texts which purport to contain what every 2nd, 4th, or 6th grader should know. It is embodied in the information lists many of us undoubtedly equate with "official" school knowledge: the presidents of the United States, the multiplication tables, the periodic chart, the causes of the Civil War, and the states of the union. One of my own memories of the trivialization of knowledge occurred when an eccentric guest at a dinner party decided to demonstrate his intellectual prowess by reciting the 50 states of the union in reverse alphabetical order.

This type of knowledge is often rewarded by good school grades, but has little to do with developing such habits of the mind and heart as perspective, analysis, imagination, or empathy (Sizer, 1992). It is disconnected from real-life events and does little to help us form human relationships, make a living, or participate in a democratic society. It is essentially irrelevant,

superficial and misleading, creating the illusion that we are educated when, in fact, we are merely clever. Schools should free students from meaningless mental tasks. Instead, they should provide students with knowledge which is connected with their lives and empowers them to deal with authentic, meaningful problems. A professional development school, therefore, should be *problem-focused.*

Another type of knowledge which schools should free students from is that which ignores, isolates, or subordinates certain identities. Schools do not merely reproduce and legitimate certain types of knowledge, they reproduce and legitimate certain types of identity and human subjectivity as well (Foucault, 1972; Apple, 1982; Wexler, 1988; Weis, 1990; Luke and Gore, 1992). Dominant group cultures generally have the power and influence to shape school cultures in their own image (Bernstein, 1975; Bourdieu, 1977). Stories abound from and about individuals who have felt humiliated and marginalized in their school experiences because of their race, ethnicity, skin color, religion, disability, gender, or sexual orientation (Rich, 1985; Belenky et al., 1986; Locust, 1988; Neira, 1988; Barone, 1989; Lake, 1990; Kozol, 1991; Britzman, 1993). These experiences are not just the result of words voiced by prejudiced peers but of sanctioned school norms themselves. Opposite this type of learning environment is one which would be respectful of and responsive to individual and cultural differences. It follows from this that a professional development school must be *multicultural and inclusive*.

The last type of knowledge I believe PDSs must free learners from is that which treats the present as though it were the best or the only possible world--which promotes incremental, but not alternative thinking. Because a primary function of schools in all societies is to enculturate new generations, to pass on social norms, expectations, worldviews, and ways of life, schools tend to be conservative institutions. They safeguard, preserve, and glorify the past, often eliminating controversial events which might put the government or dominant groups in an unfavorable light. In doing so, schools often function as guardians of the status quo, preserving the privilege of powerful groups while silencing social critique and reform. In societies where knowledge is

noticeably suppressed, civil disruption often occurs. In cases where such suppression is more subtle, the status quo generally remains unchallenged. In both cases, however, learners are excluded from democratic discourse. Education is not created as an opportunity to explore conflicting values and future possibilities. Concepts like ethical decision making, social values, oppression, and institutional discrimination are not central to the curriculum. Hegemony is preserved. Freedom from hegemonic control can only occur if schools empower students to reshape the world in ways which are more humane, just, equitable, and liberating. This suggests the last characteristic of an empowering learning community, that it be *social reconstructionist.*

The remainder of this paper describes these four characteristics of empowering learning communities--constructivism, problem-focused, multicultural, and social reconstructionist--in more detail and explains how they can guide the work of professional development schools. What that means is that they must help us conceptualize teacher learning as well as student learning.

Constructivist. This characteristic traces its roots to Piaget whose research indicates that each of us constructs our knowledge "painstakingly over time, with each tentative action or hypothesis representing. . . current attempt[s] to make sense of the world" (Gardner, 1991, p. 26). Therefore, a PDS should both take advantage of and challenge "natural learning." It should free us from misconceptions which limit or distort our sense-making by engaging us in reflection on meaningful experience and teaching us how to monitor our own thinking processes. A constructivist learning community would free us from thinking bound by habit and tradition and move us toward thinking characterized by logic, criticism, and judgment. It would engage us in meaning making; in making sense of our physical and social worlds.

Constructivism also implies a particular view of subjectivity--subjectivity within a democratic context. As such, it is a normative (as well as an empirical) claim. It expresses a belief that liberated human subjects should be active in creating their worlds and assigning meaning to those worlds. This liberation should occur within the dialogical context of a learning community.

In this sense, my notion of constructivism owes as much a debt to Freire (1972) as it does to Piaget and is closely linked to social reconstructionism.

Problem-focused. A professional development school should give us the tools to frame, analyze, and resolve (or at least cope with) authentic issues, problems and dilemmas. John Dewey is still probably the most eloquent proponent of a problem or experienced-based education. Always trying to relate the psychological needs of the child with the social needs of the community, Dewey (1900) argued that problems cannot simply be generated from students. Teachers must guide children's interests to make them educative. Since their (and all our) worlds are limited, external interventions and guidance are needed. Each of us needs to be encouraged to take on--sometimes even to recognize--more difficult, more socially relevant, or more scholarly matters.

Dewey (1900) also argued against the type of education that was solely preparation for the future, claiming that it had no power to motivate and treated children as though they were on a "waiting list." Learning experiences had to hold meaning in the present, not in some possible and hard to imagine future; the forms and tools of learning had to be subordinated to experience. This did not mean that the subject orientation of the curriculum had to be abandoned, but that academic knowledge had to "appear in the curriculum as vital and interconnected and interdependent" (Kliebard, 1985, p. 19). It had to help students deal with social problems by showing their significance in daily life and work.

Multicultural & inclusive. A professional development school should impart multicultural, global, and democratic awareness. Rather than having an individualistic and careerist orientation, it should create a sense of community and shared destiny among learners. Opportunities must be created for participants to understand the possibilities and meanings of unity in diversity and to care for one another (Noddings, 1984). A truly inclusive community would care about the good of each member. Relationships would be more important than rationality, and "empathetic understanding more important than abstract principles" (Valli, 1990, p. 43).

James Banks (1993), a leading proponent of multicultural education, has recently laid out five dimensions of multicultural education. They are: *content integration*, which incorporates information from a variety of cultures into the curriculum; *the knowledge construction process*, which examines cultural assumptions and biases in the ways knowledge is produced and valued; *prejudice reduction*,which analyzes influences on racial and cultural attitudes; *equity pedagogy*, which facilitates the academic achievement of diverse students; and *an empowering school culture*, which deals with school wide policies and practices. These five dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for viewing multicultural education as inclusive and empowering. A PDS that is truly multicultural, for example, would never empower some groups to dominate or subjugate others.

Social reconstructionist. In the U.S., this curriculum theme owes it origins to Harold Ruggs and George Counts (Kliebard, 1985). Of all the criteria on the list it is the most marginalized. It has not been able to free itself from accusations of indoctrination. Or, perhaps it is marginalized because it challenges the status quo and the interests of the dominant culture. Current scholars whose work is informed by critical theory have proposed a rebirth for social reconstructionism (Zeichner and Liston, 1990). Perhaps it is time we reconsidered whether schools should convey the notion that since the world is socially constructed, it can (and needs to) be reconstructed in ways that are more just, equitable, and liberating.

Social reconstructionism is about creating a better world. It asks schools and teachers to acknowledge that the world is imperfect, that many suffer, and that many of our problems are socially created and systemic. It asks schools and teachers to believe that the creation of a better world is possible and to direct their curricular and educational efforts around the tasks of identifying problems and helping students acquire the skills and motivations to solve them. Critics are concerned that through these curricular efforts, teachers will impose their own visions of "a new world order" and ways of bringing them about. Proponents, however, argue that, in a democracy, education that is social reconstructionist would have to promote multiple and

competing perspectives. It would have to help students and teachers develop their own ways of analyzing and addressing critical problems. Learning communities which embody constructivist, problem-solving, and multicultural principles would also safeguard against tendencies toward indoctrination because these principles counter hegemonic knowledge.

My current thinking, then, is that a professional development school should be a learning community whose primary function is the empowerment of all its participants. It should convey the belief that people have the power to learn and to work with others to effect change by opening up opportunities, expanding capacities, and impassioning learning (Paul, 1987). For this to occur, members of learning communities must themselves struggle over the defining characteristics of those communities. These must not be imposed. As attached as I am to my own version of a PDS, the ultimate irony would be if participants were told that they would now have an empowering learning environment. The local work of creating professional development schools must not be displaced by, but must take place within, the broader dialogue of schooling, teaching, and learning.

This vision of empowering learning communities is itself criticism of what schools and universities do not do or do not do well enough. There would be no reason to propose that learning be constructivist, problem-focused, inclusive or social reconstructionist if it already engaged students and teachers in making sense of their world, gave them tools to resolve real problems, was respectful of and responsive to individual differences, and provided visions of the common good. There is, in fact, plenty of evidence that schools and teacher education programs in the U.S. often fail to activate prior learning, relate to students' lives, bind us together in our diversity, and guide us in addressing important social issues (Goodlad, 1984; Oakes, 1985; McLaren, 1986; Ginsburg, 1988; Irvine, 1990; Sleeter, 1991; Dilworth, 1992).

Making the Vision Concrete

So what would professional development schools as learning communities look like if they embodied these principles? How would they be different from traditional schools and teacher

preparation? As just some examples, these learning communities would be less bound to textbooks, teacher talk, traditional modes of grouping, and the dominant culture.

Textbooks are seldom scholarly sources of information. They are generally used to transmit bodies of knowledge rather than to help students construct knowledge, and tend to treat academic subjects as isolated, finished products rather than ways to address meaningful problems. They inhibit interaction with others and exploration of their worlds, and generally offer a falsely benign and sanitized view of the world. In pursuit of profit and the largest share of the market, the goal of textbook companies in the U.S. is to offend no one (Apple, 1986). In professional development schools, primary sources, multicultural artifacts, trade books, case materials, reference books and personal experience would take the place of textbooks as curriculum sources. Autobiographies and oral histories would be valued resources for learning for both students and teachers (Valli, 1992).

Teachers and teacher educators would spend little time transmitting knowledge. This practice, though common, does little to empower students, facilitate metacognition, or develop constructivist habits. Instead of dispensing or depositing information, to use Freire's (1972) banking metaphor, teachers would be coaches, facilitators, and resources. They would draw out, respect and challenge student knowledge, working from student interests, concerns and problems.

Traditional modes of grouping, generally by age and ability, often discriminate on the basis of race, class, and gender. In efforts to accommodate individual differences, schools are often non-inclusive and culturally biased. Those with the least educational advantage when they start school continue to get the least knowledge, resources, and teaching expertise (Oakes, 1985). They often experience what Martin Haberman (1991) calls a "pedagogy of poverty." Instead of rigid ability groups, a PDS needs to be much more flexible with "communitarian" modes of grouping, such as peer and cross-age tutoring, and group projects which draw out different forms of expertise (Brown, 1992). The basis for grouping would be individual care, not ease of instruction. Boundaries between novice and experienced teachers would also be relaxed with school-based inquiry groups.

The dominant culture would receive greater challenge in a professional development school. In efforts to link learning communities to the larger social project of equity and justice, members would be encouraged to study diversity not merely as cultural differences to be respected, but as differences created by power relations. Students would examine what keeps certain groups "from fully enjoying the social and financial rewards" of the country while other groups dominate and benefit (Grant and Sleeter,1989, p. 54).

By proposing these characteristics of empowering learning communities, I am not suggesting that educators create discrete learning activities to satisfy each criterion separately, so that on Monday, for example, there would be a hands-on science project which embodies a constructivist perspective, on Tuesday some type of multicultural activity, on Wednesday a group problem-solving activity and so forth. While that approach to curriculum development might indeed be an improvement over what commonly occurs, it does not go far enough in creating a coherent, unified climate for learning. What I propose instead is that any learning activity in which students, interns, or experienced teachers engage embody as many of these (or some other agreed upon) characteristics as possible. This would help integrate and more thoroughly transform a fragmented, subject-oriented curriculum.

I offer just one example of such a learning activity which can be used with both teachers and students.[4] It comes from a colleague of mine, Steven Selden, at the University of Maryland, College Park, who developed it with graduate students in a course called EDPA 634: The School Curriculum. Professor Selden asks students to examine a "charitable" practice of the two largest supermarket chains in the area--the practice of giving free computers to local schools. To get free computers, the only thing the schools have to do is to collect cash register receipts from students. These receipts are then submitted to the supermarket which totals their monetary value and exchanges them for computers.

In keeping with the course theme of social justice, and relating curriculum to meaning making and education policy, students are asked to consider, "Who benefits from this program?

Does it lead to increased equality or inequality of educational resources?" To answer these questions, students examine issues about equal opportunity, hidden costs and benefits, the school curriculum, and social ideology. They begin by collecting and displaying data on a set of maps and overlays. The first map uses census tract data to show residential income patterns. Students then produce an overlay showing where the supermarkets are located. Are they evenly distributed in all neighborhoods, irrespective of family wealth, or are they concentrated in certain areas? Two other overlays depict the number of computers in schools and in homes. Students then analyze how distribution patterns relate to justice, opportunity, and family income.

Several related issues emerge from this investigation of the computer give-away program. One issue is the amount of money rich and poor people spend on food. If poor families don't have equal access to supermarket chains, is food more or less expensive in their local, neighborhood stores? Do these stores give away computers or other comparable educational benefits? Who, in other words, has the greatest chance of getting the most register receipts and, thus, the most computers?

Another issue is who benefits and who loses in this competitive game. Students search for hidden costs and benefits. Do the food stores take tax write-offs for this philanthropic work? If so, how much does that lower tax revenues? How do tax breaks for businesses affect resident tax payers? They determine whether anyone else benefits from the give-away program--such as a retail distributer. If there is a retailer profit, how does that affect the number of computers given to the schools? Do certain food chains somehow get "free" advertising through these programs?

Students also examine the relation between this practice and the school's curriculum. Do school principals and teachers promote shopping at these stores? Do they make announcements over the public address system? Hold pep rallies and spirit assemblies to inspire (or pressure) students to bring in register receipts? Send students into stores to ask customers for receipts? If so, such practices are a direct reflection of the school's curriculum. Have teachers and principals become unpaid advertisers for big business, uncritically selling the supermarkets' products and

image of being a good neighbor? Has a market mentality bought its way into our educational system? What else would we let buy its way into the schools?

And finally, students in the course examine the impact the computer give-away program might have on both the ideology and practice of equal opportunity. If rich people spend more money on food, in absolute dollars, than poor people, and if rich people have more opportunities to shop at these supermarkets, then the game is rigged against the poor. No matter how much they hustle, it is virtually impossible for the poor to earn as many computers as their more wealthy counterparts. But the meritocracy illusion is confirmed. The poor are poor because they are not like the rich. They don't work hard enough. They have no one to blame but themselves. Their personal worth becomes equated with cash register receipts and the school, in effect, perpetuates the myth that those who run the fastest win the race. It continues to hide the fact that inequalities are often structural rather than personal.

It should be clear from this example how the learning communities I envision would be different from traditional schools and how, at times, the same curriculum can be used with both PDS children and adults. In the "Computer Give-Away" curriculum example, participants are constructing meaning out of real social and personal issues. Working together, they develop scholarly problem-solving skills which have the potential of empowering them to effect change. In this particular case, students and teachers could construct a formal report with policy recommendations to the school system and supermarket chains.

Conclusion

In sharing these thoughts with colleagues, I was reminded that classroom teachers do not "re-invent" the curriculum by starting with basic principles. University professors and graduate students reported on recent meetings they had attended where teachers pulled out state mandates, the county curriculum, and local textbooks as the realistic parameters in which they worked. Yet when I looked at the principles for curricular design which our neighboring school personnel had created from these constraints, I found considerable overlap with my own vision. The teachers

spoke of developing the curriculum around essential questions and authentic learning experiences; of encouraging students to explore their worlds through discovery and inquiry-based approaches; of personalizing the educational environment with the idea of student as creator and experimenter; and of using constructivist and multicultural models throughout the re-design.

I was lucky. Often this much overlap does not exist between the world of the university and the world of the public schools. But whatever distance there is between us, we must start by finding some common ground and then negotiating our differences in professional development schools. Otherwise, we might create learning environments, but we will never create learning communities--presuming, of course, that is our goal.

As I have argued, learning theories in themselves are an insufficient basis from which to envision learning communities. Learning communities are never neutral, but always incorporate political decisions about what members of a particular society (and what society itself) should be like. Learning theories and social visions obviously need to support one another to have any kind of efficacy. I have proposed a vision of a "better society" as one in which each member is emancipated from ignorance, irrelevance, subjugation, and hegemony by being empowered to construct meaning, solve real problems, respect individual and cultural differences, and reshape the world in keeping with democratic and pluralistic values. Only a learning theory which promotes reasoned judgment, self-directed learning, and dialogic decision-making can support these social goals.

Notes

1) David Cooper, James Greenberg, Willis Hawley and the other members of the University of Maryland, College Park Committee on Professional Development Centers have, each in their own way, influenced the way I think about learning and learning communities. I would also like to thank Jerome Allender, Sharon Conley, Alan Tom, and Bruce VanSledright for helpful comments on my initial ideas for this paper.

2) Organizations such as the Holmes Group (1990) and the PDS Network (1993) have published principles or vision statements about professional development schools. Unlike the beliefs I propose here, which are strictly curricular, these groups focus on many of the important organizational principles that need to be addressed in creating and supporting professional development schools. Some of their themes resonate with those I develop here: a strong emphasis on the interactive, communitarian aspect of learning, on the importance of multiculturalism and inclusion, and on problem focused curriculum. There is less overt mention, however, of themes like empowerment or social reconstructionism.

3) I thank Steven Selden for letting me interview him about this program and giving me permission to use this example. Kevin Vinson, a graduate student in the course, also provided me with information.

4) Many excellent sources are available for rethinking the school and teacher education curriculum in keeping with the principles advocated in this article. Among them are: Nancy Schniedewind & Ellen Davidson, *Open Minds to Equality: A Sourcebook of Learning Activities to Promote Race, Sex, Class, and Age Equity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983; Carl Grant and Christine Sleeter, *Turning on Learning: Five Approaches for Multicultural Teaching Plans for Race, Class, Gender, and Disability*, NY: Merrill, 1989; Kathleen Weiler and Candace Mitchell (Eds.), *What Schools Can Do: Critical Pedagogy and Practice*, NY: SUNY, 1992; Linda Valli (Ed.), *Reflective Teacher Education: Cases and Critiques*, NY: SUNY, 1992; Daniel Liston and Kenneth Zeichner, *Teacher Education and the Social Conditions of Schooling*, NY: Routledge, 1991; B.R. Tabachnick and Kenneth Zeichner, *Issues and Practices in Inquiry-Oriented Teacher Education*, London: Falmer, 1991; Theresa Perry and James Fraser (Eds.), *Freedom's Plow: Teaching in the Multicultural Classroom*, NY: Routledge, 1993; Landon Beyer et al., *Preparing Teachers as Professionals: The Role of Educational Studies and other Liberal Disciplines*, NY: Teachers College Press, 1989.

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